

Evolution not Revolution: the Barcelona Process, ten years on

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"The reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated," Mark Twain famously wrote to the US press after his obituary had prematurely appeared in their columns. Some Mediterranean analysts might appear to be in the same indecent haste to offer similar condolences to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. However, contrary to some death notices, the Barcelona Process is not dead. It is alive and well and being mutually nurtured by the Neighbourhood Policy in their common quest for peace, security and prosperity in the region. This year, dubbed 'The Year of the Mediterranean' by Euromed Foreign Ministers at The Hague Ministerial in November 2004, the Partnership will also celebrate its tenth anniversary. The tenth year of any relationship commands special attention. It can be taken as a period of reflection or projection, a milestone or a millstone, a symbolic hook or a springboard. It can also be a mixture of all these.

In some ways the evolution of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership can be compared to the construction of the European Union. Just as Europe's incremental move towards integration failed to attract too much media attention (apart from the detractors and dissenting voices) neither has the Barcelona Process been a headline-maker. Nevertheless, it has continued to make concrete progress. It is, as its title implies, a process. It is not a sprinter, but rather a middle-distance runner; neither is it a Rolls Royce but

rather a dependable family car. Sometimes that car might stall, or even break down but it will continue to move forward. Just as in the European Union, there is no reverse gear in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

While Europe and its Mediterranean partners have long been linked by history and culture, circumstances now demand closer linkages and interdependence to address the common problems of terrorism, illegal immigration, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, environmental degradation, international crime, etc. Today, as globalisation increases, the EU still remains the main partner of Mediterranean countries both in trade of goods and services. More than 50% of the trade in the region is with the EU, and for some countries the EU represents the destination of more than 70% of their exports. Europe is the largest direct foreign investor (36% of total foreign direct investment) and the EU is the region's largest provider of financial assistance and funding, with almost €3 billion per year in loans and grants.

As we move towards the end of the Partnership's first and defining decade looking back will help see how far we have come in the relatively short time of ten years. The much vaunted – some would say lofty – aspirations set out in the Barcelona Declaration outlined peace, stability and prosperity in the whole Euro-Mediterranean region as the major objectives. This, essentially, was an attempt to extend southwards the zone of peace and prosperity achieved within the EU, through a process of North-South, but particularly South-South integration. The establishment of a Free Trade Area by 2010 is a means to an end, a way to attain the long-term

goal of peace, something Europe had attained through integration.

Substantial progress has been made but much still remains to be done. The Barcelona Process has established a comprehensive set of co-operation activities in areas ranging from trade liberalisation, economic reform and infrastructure networks to culture, education and the movement of people. It has shown that governance, human rights and common global challenges can be fruitfully discussed, if they are handled through partnership.

The bedrock of our cooperation, the Association Agreement, has been negotiated with all countries and most are in force. All countries have agreed on a schedule of tariff reductions, a necessary pre-requisite on the road to free trade. The achievement of the liberalisation of trade in goods has to be tempered by slow progress in the liberalisation of trade in services and agricultural products. However, regional integration in the Mediterranean region points an encouraging way forward with the signing of the Agadir Free Trade Agreement between Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia and Turkey's respective Free Trade Agreements with Morocco, Tunisia and the Palestinian Authority. The regional dimension has been further enhanced by the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly and by the establishment of the European Investment Bank (EIB) sponsored Euro-Mediterranean Investment Facility for the Mediterranean (FEMIP).

Yet, when all the policies, programmes, declarations and action plans are pared down to their essential nucleus, the Barcelona Process is really about bringing people and cultures together through partnership and dialogue. Dialogue bet-

ween cultures is essentially a dialogue between people, not between anonymous cultural entities. The recent inauguration of the 'Anna Lindh Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures' in Alexandria focussed minds on the point that partnerships are principally about people. The Foundation will play a pivotal role in assuaging the common suspicions, stereotypical and negative images that still prevail in parts of the 'West' and 'Arab' worlds. This will be done in a very practical way by giving present and future generations the instruments of dialogue. Young people will be encouraged to learn at least one foreign language and to acquire knowledge about all religions and cultural traditions that have shaped the Euro-Mediterranean region as the crossroads of civilisations. On the political front we cannot pretend other than progress has been slow. Institutionally, the architecture is in place to meet the challenges that reforms imply. Unfortunately, the continuing conflicts in the region have often impeded the search for consensus. But while progress on the Middle East Peace Process is an essential element for the success of any reform policy, the ongoing conflict should not be used as a fig leaf or alibi for inaction or universal excuse by partners to avoid reforms.

Certainly, the landscape is becoming littered with strategies and visions for its future. It seems like everyone has a theory or thesis on the problems besetting the region and is armed with a pocket paradigm or panacea for their resolution. I do not need to add to that debate or underline the problems still facing the Mediterranean and Middle East region. The UNDP reports have eloquently and starkly drawn attention to the major deficits in culture, education and political freedoms. The lack of individual freedoms and the subjugated role of civil society have contributed to smothering individual initiative and economic development and have resulted in disconnecting populations from decision-making processes. It is certainly not Europe's role or intention to impose the necessary reforms; home grown change is the most acceptable and durable. Europe's great catharsis after the last war involved the pioneering and development of a unique process of regional integration, of the pooling and balancing of nation-

al sovereignty against the need for common structures and common disciplines. It has been a tremendous force for political stability. Europe can, therefore, help and support this Mediterranean quest for transition. In our relations with our southern partners unless we encourage a process of economic and political change, change will come instead in undesirable forms and at an undesirable pace.

It has been said that borders are history's scars. A flick through the back pages of Korea, Cyprus, Ireland and Germany, among many others, will bear witness to that statement. There have been worries among our Mediterranean partners that the recent enlargement of the European Union might result in new borders being drawn or the creation of new dividing lines to the detriment of relations with our partners, and that the new borders would be exclusive rather than inclusive, closed rather than open. The European Neighbourhood Policy is a clear response to those concerns and to the changing composition and shifting borders that enlargement implies. The new policy has been designed to include and integrate our neighbouring partners into the new, enlarged economy by offering them many new opportunities, one of which is tariff-free access to the new expanded market of 25 countries.

There has been a certain amount of confusion from commentators and critics of the European Neighbourhood Policy concerning its role and status vis-à-vis the Barcelona Process: Does Neighbourhood replace Barcelona? Is Neighbourhood the logical extension, and new articulation, of Barcelona? Does Neighbourhood constitute an important policy shift within EU policy towards the South? Is it an attempt to offer a 'consolation prize' to the EU's neighbours, new and old? The answer to all the preceding questions is 'no'. Neighbourhood and Barcelona are complementary and mutually reinforcing, aiming to create enhanced relations while supporting and promoting domestic reforms. The European Neighbourhood Policy offers partners the possibility of a stake in the EU internal market and the chance to participate in EU policies and programmes. It will build on existing systems and structures, using the Barcelona platform, to agree common Action Plans with part-

ners that can bring about a qualitative change in Euro-Mediterranean relations. Communication is the key to unlocking the confusion and opening up the realities and possibilities of the Partnership to the populations on both sides of the Mediterranean. For that it is vital to bring the partnership closer to the people. There have been many concerns voiced at all levels about the perceived 'information deficit' concerning the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The Commission is aware of this and has this year launched a dedicated region-wide information and communication programme as a complement to other information activities in the region. This innovative inclusive scheme, dubbed the EuroMed Dialogues aims at mobilising the mass media, civil society and youth in its implementation. It is not a machine for proselytising or peddling propaganda, but more an effort to engage the various stakeholders in discussions about the further evolution of the Partnership. Through a programme that includes a pan-regional television series of debates, dialogues and documentaries on subjects related to the Partnership; senior Euro-Mediterranean journalists/analysts conferences; training and exchange opportunities for young journalists; cultural exhibitions and competitions for youth; and other targeted activities for civil society, the business and academic sectors an holistic approach is being taken to raise awareness and share opinions on the different aspects of Euro-Mediterranean relations.

In an exercise that squares the circle, this year – ten years after the signing of the Barcelona Declaration – all roads return to Barcelona for the specially convened Euro-Mediterranean Summit in November. Certainly it will be an occasion for reverie and reflection, there will be celebration too. But there is also serious work to be done. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has arrived at this watershed year with the knowledge and strength that experience brings to long-term relationships. While it will cheer the successes of the last ten years, the growing maturity will ensure that it is not blind to its shortcomings. Those challenges – human rights and democracy, sustainable economic growth and reform and education – are articulated in the Commission

TEN YEARS OF THE BARCELONA PROCESS

The year 2005 as the Year of the Mediterranean should not just be a year for celebrations, but also a year of reflection and evaluation by the authorities and of raising awareness within the civil society. Ten years have passed since the Barcelona Declaration and it is now time to re-launch and update the Barcelona Process, setting new priorities and introducing new working methods to obtain greater efficacy in the pursuit of the original objectives and the new ones we are going to establish.

These objectives will not be essentially different to those already established, but they will vary in the order of priorities, in function of the evolution of the EU, as well as of the Mediterranean context after ten years of Partnership.

The new priorities should be negotiated and fixed jointly with all the partners, as was done in 1995 and the opinions, assessments and contributions of each and every partner will be considered very important.

It must always be remembered that the Barcelona Process is not, strictly-speaking, an EU policy on the Mediterranean, but is in fact a mutual decision made by all the countries on the Mediterranean shore (the members of the EU and those of the Southern shore) who have created a unique model of regional cooperation, which during the last ten years has been an invaluable forum of permanent dialogue whilst an even more institutionalised relationship was being consolidated, culminating in the emblematic creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly and of the Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures in the Arab land.

The European Neighbourhood Policy will now strengthen the Barcelona Process by means of possibilities – updated and differentiated for the partner countries – of progressively benefiting from all the advantages of the EU internal market but conditioning this gradual greater integration into the internal market and

of the different policies and community programmes into political, institutional and economic reforms. A system of benchmarks is established which will put all the neighbouring countries in the EU, the new eastern members and the usual countries to the south to compete with each other.

The Barcelona Process and the European Neighbourhood Policy which completes it, are fully compatible with the Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean and Middle East.

A point of union between all of them is precisely the need to proceed with the reform process already started by the EU in its own image, which means the best example of a reforming process known in the world. It should not be forgotten that the Union has never stopped reforming, in other words, adapting and modernising, since the creation of the first European Communities; neither has it ceased to expand: a clear sign of its success.

On the occasion of the extraordinary meeting to commemorate the 10th anniversary, which will take place in Barcelona, it will be necessary to reaffirm the Barcelona Declaration and at the same time, adopt a new political commitment to share, within mutual respect, the values and principles of democracy, of respect for human rights and political participation, contributing to open larger spaces of freedom between each and every one.

This mutual effort cannot be uniquely inter-governmental and the civil society should participate to give it full legitimacy and credibility. The aim is not to impose exogenous models – each has its own – but to share principles and values that permit coexistence and progress in full and mutual freedom.

A clear commitment to the new objectives of the international agenda will also be necessary: the fight against terrorism, against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, against organised crime and against uncontrolled population movements.

The Barcelona Declaration and the new

Neighbourhood Policy will provide the foundations of the new commitment: The Barcelona Declaration is our political umbrella and the European Neighbourhood Policy an instrument proposed by the Commission, which entail individual action plans which must be put in place soon, without forgetting at any time the multilateral and institutional aspects of the Barcelona Process, which are those that will give precisely that 'plus' in relation to our Mediterranean neighbours.

Regarding future financial resources, it is necessary that they are sufficient and that their management is efficient to obtain the best results. New working methods and financial instruments are needed for the public sector as well as, above all, the private sector.

But we cannot content ourselves with financial resources, it is also necessary to promote trade with the objective of 2010 by when a Euro-Mediterranean free-trade area must be established. If this were achieved, it would be much more than a purely economic success. Migrations, which should be seen from their more positive aspect, are a very important subject which should be tackled jointly and constructively. It is an opportunity for effective collaboration between countries with conflicting dynamic demographic structure, but at the same time this opportunity requires joint control over the illegal trafficking of people.

The coastal countries of the Mediterranean, amongst those that the present-day EU encompasses, have always been neighbours and therefore we should refocus the attention of Europe towards the Mediterranean, making the most of the declaration of 2005 as the Year of the Mediterranean and of the unique example of regional cooperation that the Barcelona Process represents.

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Communication that will mark this anniversary year. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership prepares to enter

its second decade, returning to the place of its birth for further inspiration and impetus. If this is death, then as

Mark Twain added, "I won't be attending the funeral, but I will send a letter of approval."

THE BARCELONA PROCESS, TEN YEARS ON

On the tenth anniversary of the Barcelona Conference we should not miss the opportunity to try to re-launch the process which was started then – the Barcelona Process.

The Process began under good auspices. For the first time the EU was interested in the subject of the Mediterranean on the whole, and in particular the North African Mediterranean area. It even acquired significant economic commitment through the MEDA programmes. But this highly positive impetus did not last long. The Process soon deteriorated.

There were several causes of this deterioration. Terrorism and the civil war in Algeria prevented joint action in the Maghreb. The conflict in the Balkans distracted attention, above all in Italy and to a lesser extent in other Mediterranean countries. Relations between Greece and Turkey experienced an especially difficult period. And the Arab-Israeli conflict, which at the beginning of the 1990s appeared to be going in the right direction, worsened indescribably. In any case, the administration of the Arab countries linked to the Process, which were those who should have made the most of the MEDA programmes, was slow and not particularly efficient. It seemed that there was little motivation. And neither was there any encouragement from Brussels.

But on top of this there were other factors putting on the brakes. For some European countries – especially Spain and Italy – from 1996 the biggest concern was admission to the Economic and Monetary Union and, consequently, the euro – in other words, meeting the Maastricht criteria. Everything else took second place. And in Spain's case the new gov-

ernment of the Partido Popular (PP) changed radically the previous policy of the Socialist Party (PSOE). This was very obvious in various aspects, and one of these was the lack of interest in the Barcelona Process, aggravated by a clear deterioration in relations with Morocco. We should add to this that France never showed great interest in this initiative.

But the idea behind the Barcelona Process, which was a good and necessary idea ten years ago, continues to be so. And the Spanish Government, which at the time was its main instigator, is in a position to be so again. In addition the conflicts which broke out during the second half of the 1990s have abated. The fact that finally the EU has started to be seriously concerned about neighbourhood, and its neighbours, could even play in its favour. This is how it should relate to the countries in its surroundings.

Furthermore, the current situation of world-wide policy could contribute to the fact that now this initiative would have greater backing than ten years ago. On one hand, the concern about terrorism focuses greater attention on this area by the European Union and the United States. On the other hand, there has been an increase in sensitivity in the developed world for the problems of developing countries. Perhaps I am guilty of optimism, but I believe that something has changed in this sense. I believe that the fight against terrorism is better understood and even the consolidation of world balance in the globalization era requires greater economic and social attention, as well as greater solidarity.

Finally it should not be forgotten that in the idea and the development of the 1995

Barcelona conference the Generalitat of Catalonia played an important role. This should also be the case now.

This was in keeping with the triple historical and political orientation of Catalonia: European, Hispanic and Mediterranean. Since the 1980s, and with self-government regained, Catalonia has carried out an action of explanation to the rest of Europe on the role of the Mediterranean, which is generally not taken into account by a European Union which has its centre of gravity in Central Europe. But it should not be forgotten that the Mediterranean constitutes an especially delicate, and at times troubled, frontier.

It is the frontier with underdevelopment, population explosion, migrations and, at times, terrorism. The stability and progress of the Mediterranean, and especially of its southern coast, should be one of the main objectives of the European Union.

In addition Catalonia, and especially the Government of the Generalitat, attempted to get successive Spanish Governments to pay particular attention to this subject. For this it was necessary above all to have a good relationship of cooperation with Morocco and the Maghreb in general, and to stimulate the interest of other European Mediterranean countries.

The 1995 Barcelona conference responded to this approach which, as I have explained, was unfortunately not maintained and now needs to be re-launched.

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